



The Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

STATEMENT

Rheumatic heart disease and acute rheumatic fever are diseases of poverty and poor living conditions and affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those in remote regions, disproportionately.

The Morrison Government is committed to ending RHD by 2030 and progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap will be vital to achieving this.

The new National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap—to which all Governments committed in 2020—identifies fundamental reforms to change how Governments work with others to achieve better outcomes for First Australians.

Under the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, all parties will report annually on the actions they are taking under their implementation plans to achieve the agreed outcomes under the National Agreement.

For the first time a full picture of effort across Australia will be available – this picture is key to undertaking the work to achieve the Closing the Gap targets.

Reforms identified in the National Agreement were also embedded in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031, released in December 2021.

The work the Morrison Government is doing to end RHD is underpinned by broad investment in Indigenous health and health infrastructure.

The Indigenous Australians' Health Programme provides over \$1 billion annually to increase access to health care and improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This investment includes \$336.4 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health as part of the Government's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan.

Working in genuine partnership through shared decision-making and co-design with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector is critical and is the foundation of the new approach to the Government's Rheumatic Fever Strategy commencing this year (2021-22).

The Strategy builds on the work of the Roadmap to Eliminate Rheumatic Heart disease, which Minister Wyatt led in 2018 and reflects the Government's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, governance, and leadership.

The Government is investing more than \$25 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 to support the Strategy and address acute rheumatic fever and RHD.

This includes \$12 million, announced in the 2021-22 Budget, to continue support for Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia, and Western Australia to meet their obligations to register, manage and control ARF and RHD.

In addition, the Government is complementing its ongoing partnership with the jurisdictions by investing \$12 million in the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to reduce the burden of ARF and RHD on Indigenous communities.

This approach is the first of its type between the Australian Government and NACCHO, and will bring key stakeholders, jurisdictions, and experts together to focus on supporting preventive activities on the ground.

The Morrison Government has also awarded the University of Western Australia \$35 million over 3 years to accelerate the development of a Strep A vaccine to accelerate the elimination of RHD in Australia.

The University of Western Australia has laid the foundations for the study and identified the lead vaccine candidate, so that it can commence an efficacy trial in coming years for a Strep A vaccine in Australia, in consultation and collaboration with Indigenous communities.

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